Mental Health and Social-Emotional Learning Supports

Before and During the Pandemic

Student mental health supports look different now as compared to before the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic has increased and heightened students' exposure to trauma.[1] It has disproportionately impacted the Black community and communities of color. It has increased the likelihood of re-traumatization for young people who previously experienced trauma.[2] During and after the pandemic, young people will need access to a cascade of mental health supports. This chart compares the mental health supports needed before and during the pandemic, and shows how supports during the pandemic can operate in in-person and remote contexts.[3]

Before the Pandemic	During the Pandemic*	
In-Person	**In-Person**	**Remote Continued****
Tier 3: Intensive Supports		
Individualized intervention and support from a school-based professional or community partners		Individualized intervention and support via telehealth sessions from a school-based professional or community partners
Ongoing assessment and alignment with intervention in school		Coordination of services and assessment remotely or by phone
Crisis text services and hotlines might be used more		
School designated as a safe space for students		School offers a remote safe space
Tier 2: Targeted Interventions		
Small group work and peer support groups	Small group work and peer support groups, which may be influenced by new in-person policies and practices	Remote group sessions on a secure digital platform
Evidence-based screening and service referral		• Remote screenings and referral to services; ensure access to basic needs and safe home environment, especially for most disadvantaged students • Hotline use and remote chat for service connection
	Increased, regular check-ins during school time; evaluation of basic needs and safe home environments, especially for disadvantaged students	Regular calls or check-ins with students in need of bolstered support from school staff via telehealth or by following bus routes to deliver socially distanced services
Tier 1: Universal Supports		
Promote a safe, supportive, culturally responsive school climate conducive to supporting positive behavior and academic engagement; include trauma-informed practices that support students and staff	Promote a safe, supportive, culturally responsive school climate conducive to supporting positive behavior and academic engagement, with emphasis on trauma-informed approaches	Promote a safe, supportive, culturally responsive learning environment through remote means; emphasis on trauma-informed approaches will be critical
Evidence-informed psychosocial supports to foster a sense of safety, calm, self-efficacy, and hope, along with coping skills		
Social-emotional learning (SEL) class instruction led by counselors or teachers	SEL in-class instruction, which may be influenced by new in-person policies and practices	Asynchronous or synchronous SEL instruction online, which will be particularly critical to protect against the effects of trauma
Promote students' connection with peers and staff		Promote students' connection with peers and staff while remote learning on a regular basis: this may look like letters, email, e-chat, drive-by, calls, or Google Hangouts

TIER 3

TIER 2

TIER 1

*Hybrid options might also include some combination of remote and in-person practices.

**Any remote activities must take into consideration issues of equitable access to digital platforms and resources.

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Policy Recommendations

- Prioritize young people's well-being by increasing access to mental wellness and trauma-informed supports that mitigate risk factors and promote resilience.
- Increase access to supports that can be adapted in different learning settings to meet the cascade of student mental health needs.
- Fund school mental health provider positions as need demonstrates.
- Prioritize and coordinate culturally responsive, universal SEL as part of a comprehensive program to promote mental well-being for all students and mitigate the effects of trauma in our current times.
- Include SEL in remote-learning guidance and planning.
- Encourage funding for universal SEL in coordination with more intensive mental wellness supports that reach across all learning settings, whether in school, after school, or during remote learning.

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